

# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

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## ADAPTABLE PUFFISH MAY NOT MEET NEW ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGE

The desert pupfish, a tiny denizen of pools and streams in Death Valley, Calif., which has evolved to survive a long series of natural environmental challenges, may not be adaptable enough to escape extinction at the hand of man.

Since the time when Death Valley was an Ice Age lake, the pupfish has survived through changes and mutations which allow some members of the family to exist in water temperatures ranging from freezing to more than 100 degrees -- and others to live in water six times more salty than the sea.

However, a new report by a Department of the Interior task force indicates the 10 surviving species of pupfish may not survive a manmade onslaught of problems which include lowering the water table by irrigation wells, the destruction of their habitat, use of pesticides, and the release of non-native (and hungry) species of fish into their streams and ponds.

Three species of pupfish have become extinct in the past 23 years, the report states.

A pupfish, supposedly named because of his frisky, puppylike behavior, is about as long as a little finger. Males are colorful, with iridescent blues and purples on the backs and sides and black bars and dark fin edges. Females are mottled brown and usually slimmer and smaller than the males.

A pupfish lives in small pools, streams and springs in the Death Valley area. The task force report lists the present pupfish sites and the attempts -- so far of undetermined success -- to save them.

One species, the Devils Hole pupfish, recently received a reprieve when a farming corporation agreed to suspend pumping operations in the area after the Justice Department, at the request of the Department of the Interior, filed a court suit to **compel** such action.

(more)

The report estimates that between 200 and 500 Devils Hole pupfish remain in a small, warm pool in the Devils Hole area of Death Valley National Monument. Pumping operations in the area had threatened to dry up the one place in the pool where the pupfish feed and breed.

Seven Interior Department agencies are working on the task force study which also includes cooperative assistance from the California and Nevada fish and game departments, university scientists and individuals from private conservation organizations.

Scientists would like to be able to conduct further studies on the pupfish to determine why it has been, up to now, so successful at meeting the challenge of a changing environment.

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EDITORS: Copies of the task force report, "Status of the Desert Pupfish," may be obtained by writing the Office of Information, National Park Service, Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240.

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